



## Los Angeles Honors Foster Care “Heroes” and Success Stories

### *Former Foster Youth Builds Leadership Among Other Foster Youth*

#### **Tramisha Poindexter**



It's a long journey from a group home in Compton to the halls of the United Nations in Geneva, Switzerland, but former foster youth Tramisha Poindexter is determined to make the most of every opportunity to speak out for the needs of children in our foster care system. When Tramisha entered foster care as a young child after her mother died, she lacked a good support system and dealt with loneliness, fear, and sadness while trying to find stability and build a foundation for her adult life. Tramisha exemplifies the great personal resilience of foster youth and, after stabilizing her own life and establishing her own adult path, dedicated herself to improving the lives of others. A leader of California Youth Connection, a grass roots organization advocating for foster youth, Tramisha has traveled widely to help develop skills of transitioning foster youth and advocate for legislation to improve the foster care system. Tramisha is also a poet; her work reflects her own beauty, strength, and unique personality and makes a powerful impact on everyone she meets. In Tramisha's own words, "Situations sometimes come with no invitation and leave with no explanation. It's up to us to reach our final destination!"

### *Foster Mother Gives Youth a Second Chance at a Loving Family and a Good Education*

#### **Olivia Adams**



Olivia Adams has been providing a warm and loving home for foster youth for over twelve years, sheltering over 35 children during that time. When called to take in a child at the last minute, she never says no – even, as occurred with a three year old boy in need of a home, on Christmas Eve. Olivia is a single mother. She works full time and has a daughter and grandson of her own. Believing strongly in getting a good education, Olivia finds assistance to enroll all of her “children” in private schools, working hard to get scholarships for them and identifying after-school tutoring and mentoring programs, and any other initiatives she thinks will benefit the youth. She also provides other foster families with assistance and support, taking their children on the weekends, if they need a break, sharing her experience when they are dealing with a troubled youth, and providing moral support during difficult times. Olivia Adams has truly changed the lives of foster youth, many of whom she has adopted, and is fiercely committed to creating a better life for disadvantaged children.

## *A Parent Succeeds Against Difficult Odds*

### **La Toyia Conway**



On the wall in La Toyia Conway's tiny office is a police photograph of a woman who has been beaten. When asked why she displays the graphic photo, she says she keeps it there to remind herself how far she has come. Seven years ago, La Toyia was abusing substances and in an abusive relationship that caused her to lose custody of all her 7 children. When her children were placed in foster care, La Toyia was ordered to attend drug and domestic violence treatment programs. "It was a humbling experience," La Toyia says. "Detaining my kids was a horrible feeling, but the system gave me a chance to get sober...It was a swift kick and a wake-up call." La Toyia is now married, off welfare, owns her own home, and has been sober for 6 years. All of her children have returned home and are doing well. La Toyia also has a full time job as a domestic violence facilitator at the same treatment program that originally helped her. "No matter what someone told you, you can succeed," is her motto.

## *Social Worker Specializes in Medically Fragile Children*

### **Jose Galindo**



Two years ago, Jose Galindo had one of the most difficult days in his professional career. He had recently taken over the case of a 15-year-old boy who had been in a coma for several years. When the child died with no immediate family, Jose found himself charged not only with arranging for the funeral, but also finding the money to pay for it. By securing a generous donation from a local cemetery, Jose gave the boy the dignity he deserved in death. "I had to treat this child like he was my own," Jose recalled. Medical Unit Social Worker Jose Galindo is one of more than 20 Department of Children and Family social workers who specialize in handling the cases of medically fragile foster children. In attending to the many challenges and varied needs of these children, Jose is required to work through the complicated medical system to provide care for clients who have suffered medical traumas including comas, neurological disorders from prenatal drug exposure or shaken baby syndrome, HIV, failure to thrive, cerebral palsy, and heart problems. The sight of a helpless child in the hospital never gets any easier. "We need more placements for these vulnerable children," he observes, and urges more community members to open their hearts and homes to medically fragile foster children.

***LAUSD Steps Up to Close the Education Achievement  
Gap Experienced by Too Many Foster Youth***

**Hector Madrigal**



Hector Madrigal, Director of Pupil Services for the Los Angeles Unified School District, led the way after school board members directed the re-crafting of policies affecting foster youth in the largest school district in the state. As a result of hard work by Hector and the strong commitment of the LAUSD Board of Education, a new and comprehensive policy was drafted and now serves as a model for other school districts. The new directive tackles essential issues while supporting foster youth in hopes of reversing the dismal trends of multiple changes of schools, time out of school due to paperwork delays, and lost credits that contribute to poor educational outcomes for foster youth. Sadly, 30% of foster youth function below their educational grade level, and almost half fail to complete high school. Hector's willingness to challenge this *status quo* and to be a voice for children who are too easily forgotten in our school system has precipitated renewed hope that these trends will be reversed. His willingness to think outside the box, to be a creative problem solver, and to work with advocates, social workers, caregiver, families, and children is matched only by his genuine concern for at risk children.

***Warner Brothers Spearheads Hiring and Training  
Program for Foster Youth***

**Kate Chilton**



Within two to four years after emancipation, 51% of foster youth are unemployed and 62% have not maintained a job for at least one year. Under the direction of Kate Chilton, Vice President and Senior Litigation Counsel, the Warner Brothers Entertainment, Inc. legal department seeks to address these outcomes by extending extraordinary internship opportunities to former foster youth. Under the Warner Brothers program, foster youth have been part of an exciting job world, including working on international trademark assignments with experienced paralegals attending to over 20,000 active trademark files. Getting work experience with a recognizable and respected corporation is a special opportunity for foster youth. Interns receive the nurturing and guidance they need to excel and also come away with experience that significantly increases their marketability and with added confidence that enhances their ability to succeed in their adult professional life.

## ***Congregation Creates Foster Care Support Project***

### **The Reverend J. Edwin Bacon**



One of the critical needs for youth leaving the foster care system, usually at about age 18, is to have a connection with someone who truly cares about them and on whom they can rely during difficult times. Under the direction of Rector J. Edwin Bacon, congregants from All Saints Episcopal Church in Pasadena have brought together a unique brand of passion and partnership to meet these needs of foster youth. This energized group of volunteers currently has projects underway to engage congregants in a wide range of activities aimed at supporting foster youth as well as better educating the broader community about the foster care system and advocating for system change. More than 180 volunteers from All Saints fan out across the city and are actively engaged in mentoring efforts to make a real difference in the lives of children. These efforts make a tangible difference for youth. One teenager in foster care aptly articulated the critical role these mentors play: “We need someone we can look up to ... someone who believes in us.”

### **Special Award Honors California Chief Justice George for Support of Foster Youth**

#### **Chief Justice Ronald M. George**



With Chief Justice Ronald M. George at the helm, California has become a national leader in supporting dependency court innovations and establishing judicial leadership in this critical area. As chair of the Judicial Council, Chief Justice George has made access and fairness for children in the California courts a judicial branch priority. Chief Justice George showed his personal commitment by presiding over adoption cases of children who had been in the dependency system at a Los Angeles Adoption Saturday. The California Administrative Office of the Court’s Center for Children and Family Courts has been an innovator and strong leader in addressing the needs of foster youth and bringing systems together to work on the barriers and challenges foster youth face, as identified by bench officers over time. In particular, both the Judicial Council and the Center have recognized the need for training and reasonable caseloads for dependency court counsel and under the Chief Justice’s leadership pioneered the commitment to funding of effective counsel for children and parents. Efforts are also underway to implement recommendations of the national bipartisan Pew Commission on Foster Care. In the Chief Justice’s own words, “Our children and our families are our future. How we treat them says much about us as a society – and will determine what our society will look like in the future...”

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